



newsounds

What Is Psychedelic?

By SCOTT HOLTZMAN

Psychedelic music is the most misused, ill-defined and bandied-about term in music today. Everyone talks about it but no one seems to know what it really means. It's like Satchmo said when a lady asked him to explain jazz: "Lady, if you have to ask, then I can't explain it to you."

I feel the most important factor in psychedelic music is the new combination of old musical forms, combined with experimental improvisations, which is developing into a new popular musical form of the Space Age.

A musical line has been drawn here which separates the young from the old and the pros from the cons with a vengeance. It's either love it, hate it or don't understand it.

We tend in this country to tag or label everything, because we feel more secure with each item in its own category. This particular label is a bad one to begin with because it has connotations of LSD or other hallucinogens. Many people believe it is impossible to achieve psychedelic music without being under the influence of drugs.

This may have been true in the beginning, because its roots lie in Hindu, East Indian and other religious ceremonial music which are tied in with drugs. I disagree that it is necessary to be "high" in order to achieve the moods and sounds of this music.

The new Random House Dictionary defines psychedelic thusly: "Of or denoting a mental state of great calm, intensely pleasurable perception of the senses, esthetic enrancement, and creative impetus."

The following are quotes from various people in the music business who have watched this form growing. I don't necessarily agree with them, but I felt you should hear several sides of the discussion.

James Bond (KILT): "As far as I'm concerned, there are only a few true psychedelic rock records out. 'Reverberation' by **The 13th Floor Elevators** and 'I Had Too Much to Dream Last Night' by **The Electric Prunes** almost made it. Then, there's 'Tomorrow Never Knows' by **The Beatles**, which was the first truly psychedelic record. The most-psychedelic yet is 'Strawberry Fields Forever' by **The Beatles**, which makes **The Elevators** sound like **Lawrence Welk**.

"The term is a bad one because of the LSD origin. This is not a term to use loosely. We don't have Narcotic Music, so why should we have Psychedelic Music? We need a new term which isn't so loose. For instance, **Stravinsky** is psychedelic to me because I close my eyes and see mental pictures. In this form of music, someone must be carried away by it . . . either the musician or the listener."

Joe Ford (KNUZ): "If it's real, it's like a dream journey through music. There is too much bad music called psychedelic. 'Eight Miles High' by **The Byrds** and 'Strawberry Fields Forever' by **The Beatles** are the two best examples. Houston is a developing ground for this kind of music because the kids here are so hip."

Walt Andrus (Engineer and Arranger): "As a general music form, if you can call it that, I believe it is influenced by East Indian rhythmic and tonal concepts. The impact on the business in general, especially of the rhythms, is stronger than most people want to admit. Even **Pet Clark's** 'Color My World' showed this influence."

"Right now it is in the same state of development as Rock and Roll was when it was Rockabilly. I've recorded **The Elevators** and these guys know what they are doing. Many groups come in here and think they are going to make noises and sound like **The Elevators**, but they can't make it because they don't understand. For instance, with **The Elevators**, two guitars will play certain parts and they make the listener hear a third part which isn't really there. It's almost impossible to record this effect, but it is there."

Buddy Covington (KNUZ): "It's an excuse for not being able to play well. Noise . . . just noise."

Chuck Dunaway (KILT): "It's a new form of expression which people will have to adjust to. It's not all good, but some of it is good and I'm anxious to watch it grow."

Well, Uh...

The Electric Prunes: "What we would consider psychedelic music is that which produces mental picture images through emotional involvement in the music. As far as we're concerned, everything can have musical value . . . noise . . . a door slamming, a horn honking . . . but it has to be used in context. We did enjoy 'Tobacco Road' by **The Fever Tree** when we played with them at **The Living Eye** recently."

"Any type of sound can be advantageous if you know when to use it and how to use it. We're not a psychedelic group . . . but it depends on how you define it . . . we put emotion and feeling into it and if that's considered psychedelic, then we must be psychedelic. To define it takes you around in circles because you are hanging a tag on it. We're against labels."

"It's like this: If you fear somebody take a wiggle stick on a guitar and run it through an amplifier and they strike a chord and shake it and the first thing you think of is a waterfall, then I'd say that was psychedelic. The average song that you hear doesn't really suggest anything other than the story that's being told in the song, but you take **The Beatles'** backwards guitar and speeded up tape. It sounds like seagulls or birds flying. That to me is psychedelic."

There you have some varied opinions. To some, it is a return to the romantic period of classical music when the highly descriptive music of **Ravel** and **Debussy** gave mental pictures to the listener. Yet, I would not call **Ravel** and **Debussy** psychedelic.

Someone said to me, "So what's new about **The Beatles** record? Backward tape and electronic sounds have been done before. Anyone can do that." I agree that it has been done before, but I don't agree that anyone can do it and achieve the same effect. The talent lies in going after an emotion and getting it.

George Martin and **The Beatles** did not throw that song together. It is carefully planned (probably more so than any other they've done) to build (or tear down) a mood. Any DJ who cuts the end off of "Strawberry Fields Forever" is missing the whole point. It would be better not to play it at all if time is short.

This record can take anyone with enough imagination and actually shift the senses. For me, it makes the room slightly revolve and the floor sinks when they go from the major to the minor. I don't enjoy this feeling, but I certainly appreciate their abilities for being able to create it.

No matter how you look at it, psychedelic music is here. It is in its infant stages, but it is a newsound which is evolving into a tomorrow sound which we will have to live with in the future. It will separate the generations more than any other recent form of pop music. It is comprehensible to the open-minded adult and young minds which have formed no musical prejudices which block their minds.

Houston has had some of the leading exponents of this kind of music, but the most pure form of it I have personally heard live was a group called **Euphoria**, which has since disbanded. I've heard unreleased tapes and spent time around these guys and I'm truly sorry they couldn't stick together, because they were strong leaders of the trend.

If I haven't clarified psychedelic music for you, it's because there is no true point of clarity in its evolution at the moment. Just relax and let it take you. Who needs a definition? It's like **Satchmo** said: "If you gotta ask, then I can't explain it to you."

Scott's Sneak of the Week: Watch for it on the **Larry Kane Show** and the **Chuck Dunaway Show**—"Malrzy-Doats" by **The Innocents** (on **Kama-Sutra**).



The Fever Tree, above, and The Coastliners, left, are among the rising music groups in Houston. Their top national releases are, respectively, "Hey Mister," and "California On My Mind."



Who Is No. 1?

It's grow time in Houston, with teen/music groups popping up everywhere. Five of them have national record releases, and it's a good time to separate the men from the boys. The Houston Post is looking for the three most popular music groups in the Houston area.

Groups are listed on this coupon with a blank space in case the fans have different ideas on who's on top. By the names of your top three favorites, mark 1) for your first choice, 2) for second choice, and 3) for third choice. Don't slip in any national or international groups; we want the locals.

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Frankie and Johnny _____
Neal Ford and the Fanatics _____
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